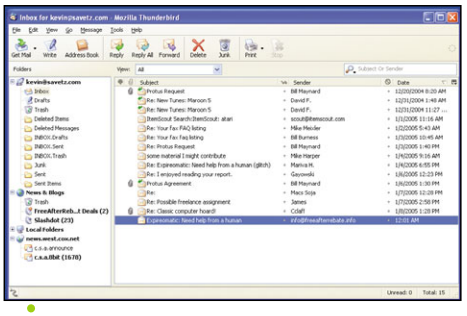
Battle Of The Free Email Clients

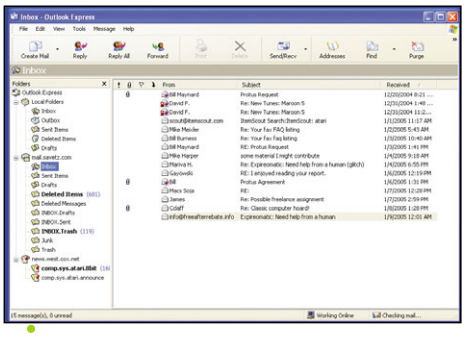
Mozilla Thunderbird vs. Outlook Express: Fight!



Thunderbird 1.0
Free
Mozilla
www.mozilla.org/products/thunderbird

Mozilla's speedy and secure, open-source Firefox Web browser surged in popularity shortly after the release of version 1.0, becoming the preferred alternative to Internet Explorer for millions of users. Can Mozilla's upstart email client, Thunderbird 1.0, similarly become *the* alternative to Outlook Express as the standard in free email tools?

Outlook Express, which comes preinstalled on Windows systems, is now at version 6 and is downloadable as part of the Internet Explorer 6 Service Pack 1 at www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads. Overall, Outlook Express is a capable client for email and newsgroups, but its biggest liability is that it is notoriously prone to viruses and other security breaches. Recent patches have fixed many of these problems, but some exploits remain and years of security troubles have permanently soured many users on the program.



Outlook Express 6
Free
Microsoft
www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads

Thunderbird also does email and Usenet, and the app's interface is similar to that of Outlook Express. Like Outlook Express, Thunderbird uses a three-pane interface by default, but you can switch to other views. Thunderbird also brings an RSS reader to the party. Although we generally prefer applications that do just one thing well, the RSS reader makes sense here and it shares the same clean interface as the email and Usenet readers.

Thunderbird includes several important features that Outlook Express only makes available with add-ons, including a Bayesian junk mail filter and a built-in spell checker (it doesn't check as you type). Thunderbird's most important advantage over Outlook Express, however, is security. Many users simply believe that Thunderbird is inherently safer than Outlook Express, as it doesn't use IE's HTML rendering engine, doesn't act on JavaScript embedded in messages, and more. Thunderbird has another characteristic that Outlook Express (or Outlook for that matter) can't match: support for Linux, Mac OS X, and other OSes. In addition, the interface is very consistent from OS to OS.

If you have more than one email account, Outlook Express only lets you view one at a time. Thunderbird gives you the option to view your accounts in a single, combined inbox. Another cool feature of Thunderbird is customizable message views, which instantly show inbox messages from family members, friends, messages you've received within the last five days, or by using other criteria you specify. In addition, dozens of extensions are available to add features or change Thunderbird's look and feel. Outlook Express can download and display messages from your Hotmail account, which Thunderbird can only do via an extension.

Outlook Express' newsreader is far superior to Thunderbird's, including a feature to kill files and the ability to combine and decode multipart binary postings. Thunderbird probably won't be an acceptable choice for Usenet addicts. It also can't match some of the features in Outlook (the email client included in Microsoft Office), such as calendar, scheduling, and PDA synchronization functions. That said, Thunderbird isn't trying to compete with Outlook feature for feature; it's more like Outlook Express.

Both programs are solid and feature-filled, but for email, Thunderbird is simply better. It pulls ahead with its spam filter and spell check features. Add in that it isn't built on IE's insecure HTML rendering engine, and you've got a powerful, safer program that's definitely worth considering switching to. ▲

by Kevin Savetz

Which App Is For You?

Both are free. Both handle email solidly. Both have similar interfaces. That's just about where the likenesses end. Thunderbird or Outlook Express? You make the call. ▲

	Microsoft Outlook Express	Mozilla Thunderbird
Email protocols	POP, IMAP, Hotmail	POP, IMAP (others with plug-ins)
Usenet newsreader	Full-featured	Yes; lacks ability to kill files, combine/decode, header customization
RSS reader	No	Yes
Spam filter	No	Yes
Spell checker	No	Yes
Email features	Contact synchronization, better address book	Global inbox for multiple accounts, customizable message views
Operating systems	Windows	Windows 98/NT/Me/2000/XP; Mac OS X; Linux; Solaris; OS/2

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless ... 2.5 = Absolutely Average ... 5 = Absolutely Perfect